

Year	1970	1971	1972	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030	2031	2032	2033	2034	2035	2036	2037	2038	2039	2040	2041	2042	2043	2044	2045	2046	2047	2048	2049	2050	2051	2052	2053	2054	2055	2056	2057	2058	2059	2060	2061	2062	2063	2064	2065	2066	2067	2068	2069	2070	2071	2072	2073	2074	2075	2076	2077	2078	2079	2080	2081	2082	2083	2084	2085	2086	2087	2088	2089	2090	2091	2092	2093	2094	2095	2096	2097	2098	2099	2100
1970	1971	1972	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030	2031	2032	2033	2034	2035	2036	2037	2038	2039	2040	2041	2042	2043	2044	2045	2046	2047	2048	2049	2050	2051	2052	2053	2054	2055	2056	2057	2058	2059	2060	2061	2062	2063	2064	2065	2066	2067	2068	2069	2070	2071	2072	2073	2074	2075	2076	2077	2078	2079	2080	2081	2082	2083	2084	2085	2086	2087	2088	2089	2090	2091	2092	2093	2094	2095	2096	2097	2098	2099	2100	

IMAGE PROCESSING APPARATUS AND METHOD

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

The present invention relates to an image processing apparatus and method, or in particular to an image processing apparatus and method for generating a monochromatic image of high resolution using the technique of pixel shift in a color imaging device having a plurality of two-dimensionally arranged photo detectors.

A solid state image sensing device such as CCD has an imaging surface with a plurality of photo detectors two-dimensionally arranged thereon and forms an image of an object on the imaging surface thereof using an imaging optical system. The resolution of the imaging device is determined by the pitch at which the photo detectors are arranged. For improving the resolution, therefore, the density with which the photo detectors are arranged is required to be increased. An increased density with which the photo detectors are arranged, however, both makes it more difficult to fabricate the imaging device and increases the fabrication cost of the imaging device. Also, an increased density with which the photo detectors are arranged and the resultant reduced size of pixels decreases the sensitivity of the individual photo detectors, as a result, the sensitivity of the imaging device is

JP-A-10-304235 discloses a method of forming a color image using the technique of what is called "image shift", in which a plurality of images are picked up by shifting the imaging surface of a solid state image sensing device by a predetermined amount each time, and then a plurality of these images picked up are synthesized to generate a color image of high resolution.

Fig. 4 is a diagram showing a conventional method of acquiring a monochromatic image. A monochromatic image of high resolution can be acquired using a plurality of color images generated by the image shift technique. Fig. 4A is a diagram showing an array of color filters for the three primary colors of R, G, B arranged at positions corresponding to the photo detectors constituting the imaging surface of a color imaging device. This method of layout is known as the Bayer scheme. In the Bayer scheme, green (G) filters for the luminance signal requiring high resolution are arranged checkerwise, and the remaining filters including alternate groups of red (R) filters and blue (B) filters are arranged checkerwise. Thus, the green (G) filters are arranged with the density (resolution) of one half of all the photo detectors, and the red (R) and blue (B) filters with the density of one fourth of all the photo detectors.

In the prior art, three images having the

same resolution are generated for the colors R, G and B. Specifically, a plurality of image data are acquired for each color by pixel shift in such a manner as to assure the same level of the resolution as the density of arrangement of the photo detectors for each color. First, as for green (G), the image data is acquired first from given relative positions of the color imaging device and the object image, and then by shifting the relative positions of the color imaging device and the object image by a pitch of one pixel as indicated by arrows in Fig. 4B. Only the green (G) portions of the two image data thus acquired are extracted thereby to generate a single image composed of the green (G) portions. As for blue (B), on the other hand, a total of four image data are acquired by shifting the relative positions of the color imaging device and the object image by a pitch of one pixel in three different directions as indicated by arrows in Fig. 4C, and then only the blue (B) portions of the four image data thus acquired are extracted thereby to generate a single image composed of the (B) portions. In similar fashion, as for red (R), a total of four images are acquired by shifting the relative positions of the color imaging device and the object image by a pitch of one pixel in three different directions as indicated by arrows in Fig. 4C, and then only the red (R) portions of the four acquired image data are extracted thereby to generate a single image composed

The generation of a black-and-white monochromatic image by this method requires the extra time of calculations for the black-and-white monochromatic image data in addition to the time required for the generation of the monochromatic images of the three colors R, G and B, resulting in a longer time for generating a monochromatic image. In the technique of shifting the image by a pitch of one half pixel described above, for example, the calculation time for synthesizing the black-and-white monochromatic image data is required in addition to the time of picking up the 16 images. Incidentally, since the 16 images are picked up at the same time for the three colors at each position, the three-color monochromatic images can be acquired in the time required to pick up 16 images.

As described above, the additional calcula-

tion time for the generating a black-and-white monochromatic image is required for the acquisition of a three-color monochromatic image.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

5 The object of the present invention is to provide an image processing apparatus and method for generating a monochromatic image of high resolution in a short time using the image shift scheme.

A black-and-white monochromatic image not substantially deteriorated in image quality could be acquired from an object image using only the green (G) color most contributive to the luminance signal. This was especially with the case with the operation of reading a voucher or slip printed in black and white. With a scanner, which generally reads a monochromatic image of characters and diagrams plotted on the paper, for example, there is no need of converting a color image into an exact black-and-white monochromatic image, but the only need is to generate a substantially compatible monochromatic image. The present inventor has empirically conceived this invention based on the above-mentioned fact.

According to the invention which has been achieved in view of the points described above, there is provided an image processing apparatus and method in which a monochromatic image only of a color associated with a filter having the highest pixel density is

acquired with high resolution using the image shift scheme, and the image is processed with the particular monochromatic image alone.

An image processing apparatus according to an embodiment of the invention comprises an imaging optical system for picking up an image of an object, a color imaging device including a multiplicity of sets of four filters for three colors one of which uses two of the four filters, each filter being arranged at a position of a corresponding pixel on the imaging surface of the color imaging device, shift drive means for shifting the imaging optical system and the color imaging device relatively to each other by the length corresponding to a predetermined number of pixels, and a device for generating and outputting a monochromatic image only from the pixel data of the same color for different relative positions before and after the shift.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

Fig. 1 is a block diagram showing an image processing apparatus according to an embodiment of the invention.

Figs. 2A, 2B and 2C are diagrams showing a method of acquiring a monochromatic image according to the invention.

Fig. 3 is a flowchart showing the steps of the process for acquiring a monochromatic image accord-

ing to the invention.

Figs. 4A-4E are diagrams showing a conventional method of acquiring a monochromatic image.

DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

5 An embodiment of the invention will be explained with reference to Figs. 1 to 3.

 In Fig. 1, an imaging optical system 1 forms an object image on the imaging surface of a color imaging device 2. The color imaging device 2 spatially
10 samples the object image formed on the photo detectors arranged two-dimensionally on the imaging surface and, after photo-electric conversion, sends the signal to an output processing unit 5. The color imaging device 2 is preferably a solid state image sensing device such
15 as an area CCD for picking up a two-dimensional image.

 Shift drive means 3 is adapted to shift the relative positions of the color imaging device 2 and the object image and thus move the color imaging device 2 on the image forming surface using electrical inching
20 means such as a piezoelectric device.

 A control unit 4 moves the position of the color imaging device 2 to the next frame position having different relative positions by driving the shift means 3 while a frame of image data is being sent
25 from the color imaging device 2 to the output processing unit 5. Thus, the image data for the next frame is acquired. In this way, a plurality of image data

5 The output processing unit 5 amplifies each
analog image data sent from the color imaging device,
and by sampling the base line portion and the signal
portion alternately, performs the correlated double
sampling for detecting a signal representing the
0 difference between the base line portion and the signal
portion. After A/D conversion, digital image data are
output.

An image processing unit 7 performs the shading correction for securing a uniform brightness over the whole screen, the γ correction for regulating the input/output characteristics, and the MTF correction for emphasizing the contour of the image. The image processing unit 7 can also convert a three-color

image of RGB to a black-and-white monochromatic image as required. Also, the image processing unit 7 can select a color image or a monochromatic image of an object in compliance with an instruction from the user.

- 5 An output unit 8 produces the synthesized image data from the image processing unit 7 on an output line 9 in a format suitable for the protocol of an external interface.

- Figs. 2A, 2B and 2C are diagrams showing a
- 10 method of acquiring a monochromatic image. For acquiring a monochromatic image, first, a plurality of color images of a specified color are generated by the pixel shift method. A monochromatic image of high resolution can be acquired using the color images thus generated.
- 15 Fig. 2A is a diagram showing a color filter array of the aforementioned Bayer scheme which is formed on the imaging surface of the color imaging device. As described above, according to the Bayer scheme, green (G) filters for the luminance signal requiring a high
- 20 resolution are arranged checkerwise with a density one half that of the photo detectors, while red (R) and blue (B) filters are arranged with a density of one fourth that of the photo detectors. As a color of the image data acquired by pixel shift, green (G) is
- 25 selected. A plurality of image data of this color are acquired and synthesized into a single green (G) monochromatic image.

Specifically, the image data of green (G) is

acquired at certain positions of the color imaging device and the object image. Then, the image data is acquired by shifting the relative positions of the color imaging device and the object image by a pitch of one pixel as indicated by arrows in Fig. 2B. The green (G) portions of the two image data thus acquired are extracted, and by interpolating the pixels lacking the pixel data of G in one image with the pixel data of the other image, a single monochromatic image of green (G) is produced by synthesis.

Fig. 3 is a flowchart showing the operation of the control unit 3 for performing the process of acquiring the monochromatic image. In step 1, an object image is picked up. In step 2, the green (G) portions of the image picked up are extracted. In step 3, the relative positions of the color imaging device and the object image are shifted by, say, one pitch as shown in Fig. 2B. In step 4, the object image is picked up. In step 5, the green (G) portions of the image picked up are extracted. In step 6, the green (G) portions of the images extracted in steps 2 and 5 are synthesized. In step 7, the synthesized image is corrected variously thereby to generate a monochromatic image. In step 8, the monochromatic image is output to an external circuit. As described later, steps 3 to 5 are repeated a predetermined number of times in the case where the pixel shift is set to one half pitch.

For acquiring the monochromatic image of blue

In the case where the relative positions of the color imaging device and the object image are shifted by a pitch of one half pixel, the image data having a density twice as high as the density at which the photo detectors are arranged can be acquired for each color.

Specifically, as for green (G), as shown in
25 Fig. 2C, eight image data having different relative
positions of the color imaging device and the object
image are acquired, and by extracting the green (G)
portions of the eight image data thus acquired, a

single green (G) monochromatic image can be synthesized.

For acquiring the monochromatic image of blue (B), on the other hand, as shown in Fig. 4E, sixteen image data having different relative positions of the color imaging device and the object image are acquired, and by extracting the blue (B) portions of the sixteen image data thus acquired, a single blue (B) monochromatic image can be synthesized. In similar fashion, for acquiring the monochromatic image of red (R), as shown in Fig. 4E, sixteen image data having different relative positions of the color imaging device and the object image are acquired, and by extracting the red (R) portions of the sixteen image data thus acquired, a single red (R) monochromatic image can be synthesized.

In the Bayer scheme, the green (G) filters are arranged with a density twice as high as the blue (B) filters or the red (R) filters. Specifically, although eight green (G) images are picked up, sixteen images are picked up for blue (B) and red (R), respectively. In the case where a monochromatic image of only green (G) is acquired with an increased density, therefore, the number of images picked up is one half of those for blue (B) or red (R). Thus, the time required for imaging is also reduced to one half for green (G). Further, since no additional calculation time is required, the time for picking up only eight

images is required to generate a monochromatic image of green (G). In this way, according to this embodiment of the invention, the time required for generating a monochromatic image can be shortened to one half or
5 less of the time conventionally required.

As described above, a satisfactory monochromatic image can be acquired using only green (G) color to which the luminance signal contributes in a higher ratio, except in the case where the object to be
10 read belongs to the green group as a whole. Especially when reading vouchers or slips printed in black and white, the image quality is not deteriorated.

The foregoing description concerns an example in which the amount of pixel shift is set to a pitch of
15 $1/2$ pixel. However, the same principle is applicable also to the amount of pixel shift at a pitch of $1/n$ pixel. The time shortened for acquiring a monochromatic image is increased in proportion to n .

Apart from the Bayer scheme used for arranging
20 ing primary-color filters of the color imaging device, a monochromatic image can be generated also by other methods of arrangement using the output of the photo detectors having filters of a color with the largest occupancy rate of the light receiving surface. Also,
25 complementary color filters (Ye, Mg, Cy) can be used for the filters described above.